UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.19/2002/2/Add.7
11 April 2002

Original: ENGLISH

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
First session
New York, 13-24 May 2002
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: AN INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Information received from the United Nations system

THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

1. The guidelines and objectives of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004) are incorporated into UNESCO's action today which is aimed at promoting cultural diversity amidst the challenges of globalization, in order to preserve the tangible and intangible aspects of indigenous heritage and cultural resources so that indigenous peoples can hand them down to future generations, and also at encouraging dialogue among cultures and civilizations. Indigenous peoples and cultures with their traditional and local knowledge are, indeed, very vulnerable and one of UNESCO's essential tasks is to preserve their unique character. The Organization's work at present consists in interpreting, relaying and implementing, in its fields of competence, the guidelines for the Decade, in close consultation with the agencies of the United Nations system, indigenous people and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

2. Within the framework of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the action of the Division of Cultural Policy draws its inspiration from the Declaration of Mexico on Cultural Policy of 1982, the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development Our Common Diversity (UNESCO, 1996) and the plan of action on cultural policy and development adopted by the Stockholm Conference in 1998. It may also be noted that the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and its plan of action, adopted by the thirty-first session of the General Conference, constitutes a major contribution by UNESCO

GE.02-41118 (E) 240402
02-36388

to the Decade and a concrete framework for interdisciplinary action in line with the aspirations of indigenous communities in the world, in particular in the area of defence of cultural pluralism. Indeed, on the strategic level, the protection of the cultural identity of indigenous people will be a major theme in UNESCO's activities, especially for the culture programme, not only in connection with the Decade but beyond, during the entire period of the Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007. In fact, in line with its strategic objective, "Protecting cultural diversity and encouraging pluralism and dialogue between cultures and civilizations", UNESCO will have to contribute to the international debate on the rights and heritage of indigenous people and also their cultural rights. As regards the Draft Programme and Budget for 2002-2003, which almost corresponds to the last implementation phase of the Decade, one of the main lines of action of the culture programme will be the "Construction of cultural pluralism and strengthening of action in favour of indigenous peoples", from which the chief results expected are, on the one hand, the strengthening and the expansion of the existing networks between indigenous communities and local and national institutions, research centres, universities and NGOs and, on the other, the implementation of intersectoral pilot projects promoting sustainable development for indigenous people. UNESCO must pursue its efforts with the entire United Nations system to promote the involvement of indigenous people in the formulation of national cultural policies, paying particular attention to cultural rights issues. The approach developed by UNESCO to respond to the problems and the expectations of indigenous people must be based on respect for their holistic concept of the world, in which development includes education, the sciences, culture and communication. The Organization will seek, in an intersectoral effort, to promote the strengthening and enhancement of the identity of indigenous communities and to foster a sense of belonging to a multicultural citizenship. While strengthening the links and synergies which exist between its various fields of competence, in order to come closer to indigenous realities, UNESCO will promote:

(a) The adoption of national cultural policies which highlight the cultural resources of indigenous people and acknowledge their cultural rights;

(b) The protection of indigenous heritage, especially intangible heritage;

(c) The active participation of the communities in the management of sites, specifically World Heritage sites and holy sites;

(d) The provision of education incorporating indigenous languages in the curricula;

(e) The participation of members of the communities in democratic bodies at the local and national levels;

(f) The provision of media infrastructure and communication facilities tailored to their needs;

(g) Recognition of the importance of the traditional knowledge at the heart of indigenous lifestyles and the establishment of links between indigenous and scientific knowledge aimed at sustainable development. For example, the implementation of the project "Local and indigenous knowledge systems (LINKS) in a global society" (draft document 31 C/5, para. 02411), whose principal content and focus relate to the natural sciences, was devised

through an intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach within the two cross-cutting themes. The aim of this project will be to promote recognition of local and indigenous knowledge, i.e. sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings possessed by communities with long histories of interaction with the natural environment, as a powerful resource for combating marginalization and impoverishment.

3. Notwithstanding everything that remains to be done, a review of the Decade's activities to date seems to show that the international community's efforts have led to encouraging results. In fact, national political authorities and civil society are more clearly aware of the aspirations and the needs of indigenous people. The assets, traditional knowledge, forms of cultural expression and cultural values of these communities have been recognized, assessed and highlighted. Several indigenous language academies have emerged and basic education provided in indigenous languages has been admitted into the school system in a number of countries. In this connection, teaching materials have been developed by indigenous specialists themselves. UNESCO is seeking to further this action by basing it on an overall concept of sustainable development. In fact, it considers that it is possible to make a case both for the broadest possible access of these populations to modernity - facilitated by the new technologies - and for the preservation and the dissemination of traditional knowledge, the source of this modernity. On the one hand, the new information and communication technologies contribute to the promotion and the visibility of the heritage of living indigenous cultures. On the other hand, traditional knowledge, forms of cultural expression and indigenous languages do not only represent a legacy from the past; they also embody an essential support for identity and memory, thereby providing innovative solutions for development for the future. Indigenous people, who number about 300 million in more than 70 countries on all continents and represent more than 5,000 languages and cultures, will thus be making a significant contribution to the wealth of the world's cultural diversity.